“Shhhhh, we don’t call them THAT!”

Belfast, 20.06.2017
AIOAF Stigma in obesity

Three Decades Of Personal Experiences Of Obesity Stigma

@schubesity
Hello, my name is Obesity. I suffer from Sven.

- Sven Schubert
- German, software engineer, patient advocate
- EASO patient council
- ASOI patient representative
- obese since early childhood
- maximum weight 6 years ago: 293 kg / 46 st
- gastric bypass 5 years ago, apronectomy 1 year ago
Out of fashion

thankfully we have already (largely) stopped stigmatising certain things

➔ Race
➔ Gender roles
➔ AIDS
Age 1, 1980

“Feed him cheesecake, that should fill him!”

East German paediatrician advising a young first time mother on how to feed her baby who never seems to get enough.
Age 3 “You’re too heavy to be carried around!”

(already requiring clothes sizes age 5-6)

East German paediatrician (again) addressing the patient directly. Following a sprained ankle injury and my refusal to return to walking long after the injury had healed.
Age 7 “Triple Double Decker”

(When your lunch box contents define who you are)

My nickname in primary school

After the older kids seen the the contents of my lunch box. My mother used to pack three double sandwiches.
Age 12 “Stop talking to me! You fat slob!”
(Not a great start into puberty)

Angry note
left in my pencil case by the girl sitting behind me in class, who I admittedly fancied.
Age 17

“You were a lot thinner during your interview, if you can’t organise a proper suit, we’ll have to part ways. Our customers demand professionalism.”

(When you are an apprentice in a bank and cannot fit into formal clothes)
Age 19

“You’re developing a condition where you will have debilitating back pain, *if you don’t lose weight*” / “...we have determined, that your body weight is not a debilitating condition at your age, therefore doesn’t warrant weight loss therapy”

(When you are looking for help but don’t fit in a category)

Clinical assessment / refusal of treatment

letter from universal health insurer following referral for weight loss therapy by my GP and a consultant in Germany
and so on ...

for another 11 years.

→ restricted travel
→ finger pointing
→ breaking furniture
→ no sex life
→ very low energy levels
→ “have you tried losing some weight?”
Life with morbid obesity isn’t fun or easy, or a choice.

Nobody is helped by shaming or aggressive confrontation, accusations or smart advice. Studies have shown, that the contrary is the case.
Decades spent in a prison of blubber...

will not only destroy your body, social life and career opportunities, ...

...also suppress any sense of self-worth, ability to enjoy life and every failed diet, every smart comment, every insensitive remark, increases the burden.
And yet, ... the language, the graphics, the debate, are toxic, aggressive and accusing.

Society will look towards the medical profession in order to form opinions on medical issues. This is where we need to start with stopping Obesity Stigma!
Thank you for your Attention!

Please ask me Anything!

follow me on Twitter and Facebook for updates on my activities and my journey:

@schubesity